

SOUTH EAST COPPICE CONFERENCE

6th – 8th October 2010

Held at Lodge Hill Centre, Pulborough, West Sussex

The aim of this event was to raise awareness of coppice woodland management, particularly the specialist hazel and chestnut industries in the South East. It was organised by local coppice organisations, the coppice industry and woodland managers and followed on from the Coppice Association North West's conference, held in October 2009, at which it was agreed a conference in the South East was required. The target audience was coppice workers, woodland owners and all other stakeholders interested in maintaining and developing this aspect of our cultural and natural heritage.

The programme included:

- site visits to woods and work places
- discussion of regional differences in the coppice industry
- exploration of the current issues for the workforce
- ideas for future development of the industry

In order to provide more information about the industry delegates were invited to write their views on the issues for the industry on flip charts on arrival and as they wished during the conference, adding details about their involvement (coppice worker, processor, woodland owner or 'other') and the county they came from. The results were collated and fed back to the conference on the evening of the second day. Flipcharts were then added, a separate one for each of the 'top ten' issues identified and delegates were asked to add their views on how these could be addressed. An open discussion was also held after the site visits and a resolution was presented – and passed – on the last day of the conference; this was:

"This conference proposes that representatives of all coppice groups, and counties/chestnut manufacturers where no formal group exists, be invited to attend the meeting at the Greenwood Centre on 15th November 2010, to discuss which identified issues¹, if any, could be best addressed by the formation of a National Coppice Association."

The event was supported by The Forestry Commission, West Sussex County Council and SEEDA/RDPE which enabled those working in the industry in the South East to attend at a substantial discount.



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¹ The issues raised by the delegates at this conference, including their suggestions for future solutions, are included at the end of this report

Wednesday 6th October

Delegates arrived from lunch time to put up their tents, see the demonstrations put on by the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group, eat sausages produced by George on the new improved mobile hot plate and get to know each other.

Peter Jamieson performed his role as auctioneer for the tool auction, ably assisted by his clerk (Mark Allery) and porter (John Sinclair). There were 65 lots in all and many useful items changed hands.



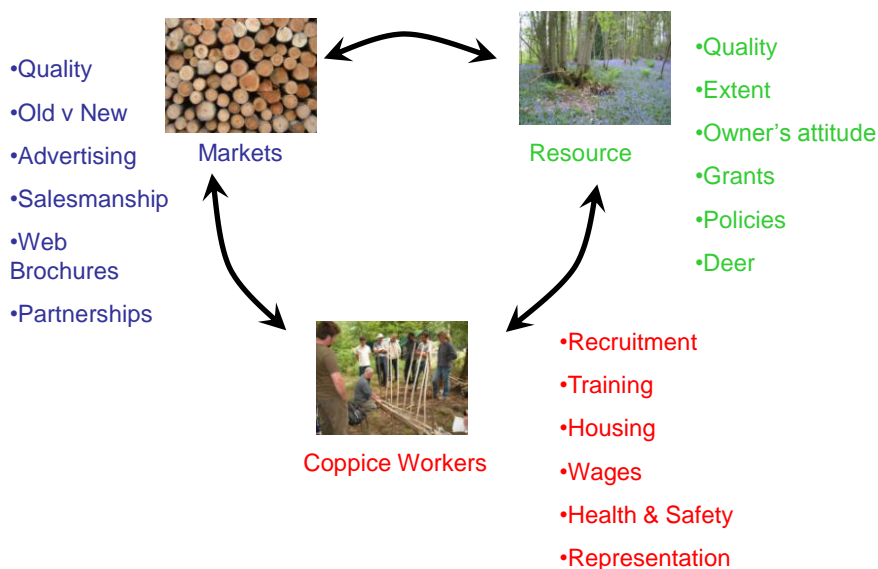
Dave Rossney and several helpers cooked up a storm in the camp kitchen with even late arrivals well fed and everyone had a chance to chat and get to know each other around the camp fire.



Thursday 7th October

Alan Betts, Regional Director of the Forestry Commission opened the conference and warmly welcomed everyone to the event. He described how the Forestry Commission’s perception of coppice had changed; 20 years ago it was a considered a side issue it is now the subject of many grants, albeit indirect. He used the following illustration of the industry as having three parts – resource, workers and markets – all of which are interdependent and has at least 6 elements. These can be barriers but are also opportunities to be developed in the future.

The Coppice Industry



He stressed that, although the Forestry Commission’s main focus is elsewhere information is required from the industry to inform policies and future funding.

Introduction to the Hazel Industry

Alan Waters gave an introduction to working hazel in the southeast, an area where it is particularly difficult to source grants as it is considered an affluent part of the country. He indicated there had been changes over the years he had been cutting hazel, and harked back to the early days when both he and Paul Clear (also in the audience) had been cutting in the same woodland, but under different teachers!

Alan stressed the need to use every piece of the ‘up and down wood’ and also talked about the crucial role of estates in deer management, deer being such a serious problem to quality hazel rod production.

He talked about the sites we were due to visit during the day, but commented that due to time constraints, it would not be possible to visit any ‘grade 1’ hazel. Neil McLaughlin, a full-time hurdle maker from Hampshire, apparently has 200 acres of this to work. Visiting this would have to be done on Saturday following the conference, and Alan offered to take any interested parties.

He stressed the need to maintain standards, share experiences and ended his presentation with the words

“Lets do it.. Discuss the issues and work together to solve them ourselves – we don’t want to be told what to do. It takes no words to do good.....if you want first class hazel go and cut the overstood material.”

Dave Rossney, Esus Forestry & Woodlands, gave a brief presentation on the research and training in the coppice industry that has been carried out over the past 15 years.

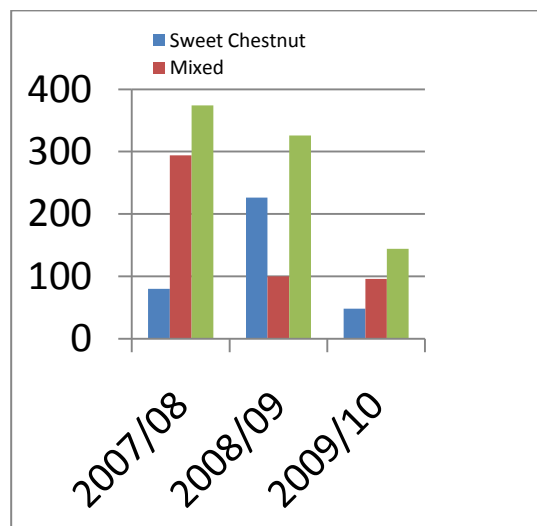
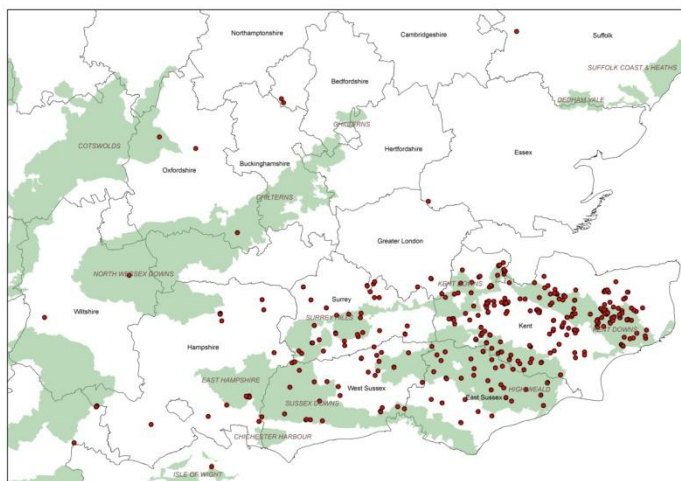
He apologised on Debbie's behalf for all the forms everyone keeps being asked to fill in ... we know how tedious they are but they are vital as without 'real' data collected in a methodical way (so that change over time can be assessed) ideas about the industry are:

- Anecdotal
- With only the loudest voices being heard

As a result

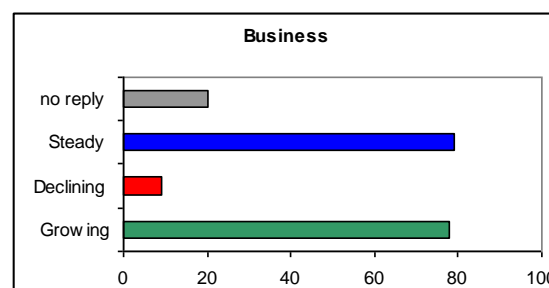
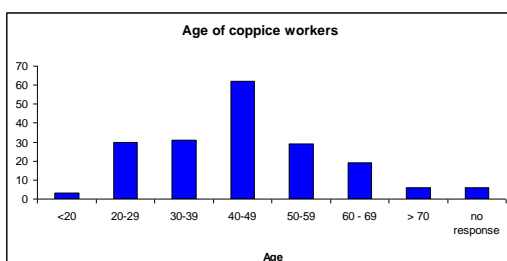
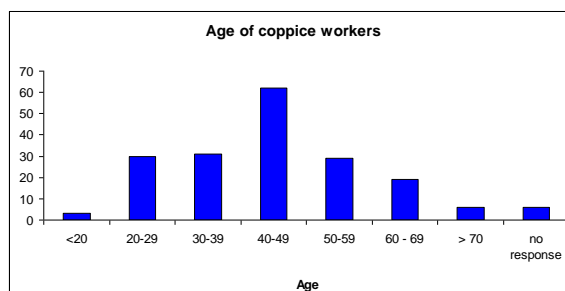
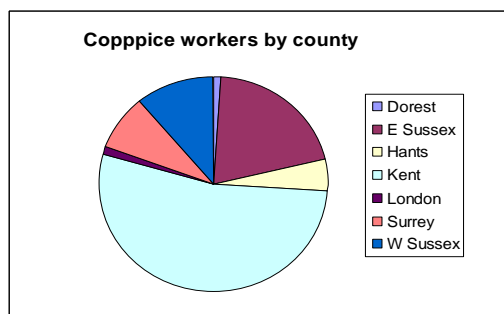
- Poor assumptions can be made
- Decision makers may be misinformed

The aim has always been to improve two way communication; we need accurate information in order to set up relevant training courses and in this way messages can be sent 'upwards', helping to release funding, as well as shared across the industry. The coppice survey, based on voluntary reporting of areas observed to have been cut between 1st September and 31st August each year, was carried out from 1999-2003, mainly in Kent. It showed far more cut annually than had been imagined. We have been repeating this for the last three years and are now extending it to other areas - so please send in information where ever in the country you are.



Please note:
figures for 2009-10 are still being added

The coppice worker's database provides numbers to crunch providing a picture of the industry – again please ask for a form to fill in – the more information in a standard form the better and be assured, it is completely anonymous.



The data is used to bid for funding so that subsidised training – and events such as this conference – can be put on. Courses are set up according to what coppice workers say they need.

Andrew King, long standing member of SSCG and a hazel hurdle maker for the last 20 years spoke about his experience. He buys about half of his material from fellow SSCG members, Alan and Jo Waters. When he started out few people knew about coppice; they might have vaguely heard of it but thought it was a thing of the past. This has changed. It is alive and well and is a desperately important business. The first issue he talked about was the resource. Hazel grows widely across the South and South East and he described how he is offered wood weekly but, having not been coppiced for many years, it is mostly too big and so useless. This material can be used for firewood and charcoal while the number of standards should also be reduced in many cases in order to improve hazel quality. Landowners are receptive but sometimes need persuading to cut. The second issue is the standard of workmanship. This must be maintained both in the cutting and skilled use of material. People may be prepared to accept low standards, particularly customers who don't know any better. Only by maintaining high standards can we become a really important business again. Despite cheap Polish imports people are still prepared to pay for good quality and local products. The demand is strong; Andrew described how he does not keep any stock and has an order book full eight weeks ahead. It is a niche market but a living can be made by more people if they are prepared to work hard. The difficulty is not selling but getting quality hazel raw material and keeping standards up.

Christine Westcott, chairman of the Hampshire Coppice Craftsman's Group, gave an account of how the area of in rotation coppice has declined since the second World War. The number of full time workers in 1973 was the same as that in 1953, around 70 but the number now is unknown as workers will not join the HCCG. This is thought to be because they are an independent lot. The Westcotts are restoring their own wood, last cut in the 1960s, by cutting for firewood and charcoal. There are landscape and conservation benefits and there has been an explosion of flowers and insects which are good for birds, bats and butterflies. The book, by Jonathan Rowe, from which the figures regarding areas of coppice were quoted, suggested that there was a need for a coppice agency – and that was over 20 years ago. Christine asked why this still hadn't happened²?

Toni Brannon described how she had been paid by Small Woods Association, Hampshire County Council, the Forestry Commission and the South Downs Joint Committee for the last two years as support worker for the Hampshire Coppice Craftsman's Group. She has been creating links with the Dorset Coppice Group and Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group. This funding has now ceased and, as she is a qualified trainer and assessor, she is exploring the potential, with Hampshire County Council Economic Development for setting up a pilot for apprenticeships that would not just be for 16-18 year olds and would be run by the Training Agency.

Site Visits

As there were so many of us we split into two groups, maps and packed lunches were distributed and people travelled in as few vehicles as possible (parking issues) and all set off for one of the two sites.

Keepers Copse, West Dean Woods is owned by West Dean Estate and managed by West Sussex Wildlife Trust for 35 years. We met Richard Ede who cuts the coppice (he is the only one with a chainsaw ticket) assisted by a group of about 15 volunteers. A range of regular surveys are carried out of the plants (the rare native daffodil is found here), birds and dormice. The presence of dormice means they now only cut between November and the end of February; previously cutting continued from September till the end of March.

It used to be run on a 14 year cycle for wood chip (very forward thinking!) but is now on a 7 year cycle for traditional hazel products, some of which are brought by local coppice workers. Several people wondered why it wasn't cut commercially – particularly as the product is saleable? The response was that the Wildlife

² A National Coppice Association was formed in the late 1980s but was disbanded in 1994 in favour of regional groups

Trust has no interest in making money and won't support another qualified cutter. Rob Atkinson, from the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, commented that they had restored coppice and now sold standing coppice to cutters. The response from Richard was that they would have a problem getting material out in time – but, although most of the work is done by volunteers they do keep prices for the fencing products in line with the commercial coppice workers so they don't undercut. There seems to be an issue with the different county Wildlife Trusts not communicating with each other on these issues. They could collaborate, sharing information and equipment, but this doesn't seem to happen. Richard also commented that the money raised does not get ploughed back into the management of the wood. The Trusts are most interested in diverse species; it was suggested that coppice cutters were keystone endangered species – and the conversation degenerated rather into comments about the need to encourage more breeding pairs..... The landscape and the woodland has been created by 8000 years of coppice cutting so why not just continue to do the same? The idea has been battle tested!

We had a cup of tea with our packed lunches before setting off for a walk through the woodland.



The myth that dormice are always associated with mature coppice was dismissed – they really like diverse mixed age woodland. Deer are a real issue and newly cut cants have to be protected by fencing. The idea of leaving radios on to keep deer away was discussed.



Coronation Copse, is 4 miles north east of Chichester just off the Goodwood Estate, and a mere 1/2 a mile from Halnaker where the Waters, who work it, live. It is now owned by the Green Family from Selhurst Park Estate, but previously belonged to the Norfolk Estate. It is thought that it was originally part of the Goodwood Estate and the name derives from the planting at the time of Queen Victoria's coronation. It is 'orchard planted', i.e. in straight lines from whichever angle you look; this is not common in hazel coppice. It is managed by Alan and Jo Waters, with the help of their apprentice, Rosie Rendell. The whole area is protected by Heras fencing panels brought second hand relatively cheaply. We were able to see a really well organised worksite and were introduced to the wide range of products they make. Alan described how he gaps up by layering, burying large stems, showed us the 'mare', a woodman's wheelbarrow with a motorbike wheel, and – with the help of Rosie – demonstrated the faggot machine and the Dutchman's knot used to tie them. Most faggots are sold for river bank restoration. The issue of FSC³ certification was discussed, particularly relevant to the Environment Agency's purchasing policy, although some reported that local officers do not always adhere strictly to this.



Alan and Jo sell at Farmer's Markets and have found re-usable bags, for a £2.50 deposit, helpful for selling logs. The importance of selling all the wood was stressed and the skill is in the grading, small logs are known as billets, gads sell well to spar makers who make good money by selling these on to the thatchers (they get £120-130 per 1000 and most make around 2000 a day). Alan said gads are only roughly cleaned – the spar makers don't pay enough for any more.

³ Forestry Stewardship Council

Various tools were demonstrated, including the Sussex side adze, and some of the delegates had a go at splitting a hazel rod, after a demo from Rosie.



We moved into an uncut area for a demonstration of electrically powered secateurs, made by Infeco.

As hazel is commonly cut small there has long been an idea that these, with batteries that last for a day, could increase efficiency.

They are routinely used for pruning in vineyards but, with a price of nearly £2000, these would be a considerable investment.



The past history of the site was discussed as we moved out of the managed area into an area of older trees badly in need of restoration. Several people had commented on the good growth of nettles; the explanation is that it was used for game management in the past.



Overstood hazel

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Discussion

After a welcome cup of tea and slice of cake Dave Rossney chaired an open discussion initially focusing on the hazel industry. The first suggestion, made by a chestnut cutter and processor from Kent, was that it should all be cut down and replaced with proper trees (we'll let him remain anonymous). The question was then asked "what do we mean by quality?" The chestnut industry has a BS for paling fencing but the public can't always judge. The product needs to be 'fit for purpose'; hazel hurdles were originally made to fold sheep and if the modern versions are still up to the rigors this demanded then they are ok. Experienced makers can judge this for themselves; peer pressure also plays a role. They are not now for sheep and some felt they are an art form and that design has altered with change in use and customers needs. Others felt adaptation is fine but that regional differences and patterns should be respected. The fact that this does not permit shoddy workmanship and craftsmanship must be maintained. The issue of Polish hurdles was brought in – they have adapted by using nails and band saws and producing a cheap version that customers do want it was suggested that both versions be taken to shows so the public could see the difference for themselves. The only way to regulate standards would be, for example, by setting standards with the Guild of Craftsmen. Ultimately the arbiter is the customer who buys the product. However there is a problem in that because the Polish hurdles only last two years then there is a tendency to think all hurdles only last this long. The suggestion was made that the public could be invited into the woods so they can see for themselves and to build a direct relationship with them. So the most powerful argument is to put both versions in front of the customer and explain. All products and services have the same problem; you need to make clear how you – and your product are better than - and different to – the competition.

It was noted that we had taken a significant time on a single product and the discussion would be more productive if time was used to look at wider issues. This met with general agreement.

Working together locally can help; the question was asked whether a national organisation would help with marketing; for example to promote the idea that coppice is good. This was refuted and others commented

on the importance of bespoke customised products and this is what gives a competitive edge. It was asked if demand was an issue and most delegates felt that marketing was not an issue; customers being kept waiting was the real problem. A show of hands supported this and 8 said they were limited by the availability of quality hazel and 4 by lack of time; only one (an apprentice) needed more customers. The resource issue was discussed and it was asked how many had cut a hectare of derelict hazel to bring it back into rotation? We were reminded about the fiasco that followed an article in a Sunday paper about hurdles, a well meaning attempt to promote the industry but a disaster as the demand could not be met. Supply issues must come before promotion and marketing; the consensus that it was time and resource not markets that were the limiting factor. Websites were given as an example with one delegate having recently been asked to supply charcoal to Canada. Raising expectations that can't be met is counter productive for everyone. Quality products sell themselves – ideally locally. Another aspect of marketing was raised, that of marketing the profile of the coppice industry rather than individual products.

Deer were raised as an issue. All are increasing, particularly muntjac, and fencing is expensive. The Deer Initiative, Forestry Commission and management groups help but even with shooting it is vital to have fencing for two years. Estates and landowners need to understand that the investment puts up the value of the coppice crop. Various alternatives were discussed, including Heras panels, but public attitudes to fencing can be negative; some reported having plastic fencing slashed. The suggestion was made that putting signs up explaining why fencing was being used could help. Signs saying 'Warning – adders' was found useful in controlling access and signs with skull and cross bones saying beware *Taraxacum officinale* (the Latin name for common dandelion) had also been effective. However fencing one area increases the browsing pressure on nearby woods – so shooting is needed. There is also a public attitude problem to deer culling. The comment was made that signs win people over one at a time and that is the way to do it – it eases their anxiety. Shooting is best as deer are damaging the ground flora too. More people are required to actively shoot the deer. There is a problem as the Deer Initiative need permission from all the neighbouring landowners to follow and complete the kill if necessary – they can't come onto land and shoot without this. There are the same issues all over the country and the lesson is that there is no magic bullet but communication will enable us to learn from each other. The owners need to be involved. Some estates, such as West Dean, earn money from bringing in people to shoot for sport, last year they shot 278. The problem is that hinds as well as stags need to be controlled. Deer affect woodland birds too and there is a pilot in the Nottingham area looking at this. All the initiatives need to work together and it was suggested that a collective voice was needed to send a powerful message, for example to landowners that it is in their interest to control deer.

The resurrection of the National Coppice Association was raised and Dave Rossney explained that the aim of the conference was not to set agendas and fall into the trap of going down this road too quickly. There is the danger of action based on poor information and lack of representation of parts of the industry. We can't afford to get this wrong as this would be very damaging for everyone. The issues need to be understood before anything can be done. The key messages from this discussion are that lobbying clout is required for the deer issue, that there is a need to raise public awareness about coppicing and that opportunities for networking and getting together are useful. This was agreed and it was appreciated that the idea of an association had been useful in bringing us together from many parts of the country but that although some issues are national some are regional and local. The comment was made that if funding for a national awareness campaign could be secured that this could be delivered locally. However it was felt that we had to be realistic and wean ourselves off dependence on funding – particularly as it is going to become increasingly harder to secure. The view was expressed that any form of association that developed its own management structure, spends money and purports to act on behalf of the whole industry was definitely not wanted – although annual gatherings that bring together the voices from the regions and produce memoranda and take these forward would be helpful. This would be effective as a federation; with the regions acting independently but meeting at least once a year although funding would be needed for this (at this point Dave Rossney thanked SEEDA and Shelly Newton for helping with this event). A flat, democratic and truly representative structure is essential for any progress to be made. The idea of a national coppice database was put forward, to support the regional organisations. Debbie Bartlett pointed out that there is already the coppice survey run with no funding and data from other parts of the country would be welcomed.

The idea of a national federation was raised again and the proposed meeting in November. Concern was expressed about the fact that this meeting intended to discuss a constitution – should it be trying to run

before it can walk? The response was that it shouldn't be assumed that anything was a foregone conclusion and that the proposal was to respond to discussions at this conference. Those who had attended the initial meeting commented that not all regions were represented. The issue of representation was discussed – was the industry really represented by the various coppice groups? Dave Rossney asked for a show of hands and 28 delegates (out of almost 80 delegates) were members of coppice groups and 24 were members of other 'woodish' groups, some of which do lobby for the coppice industry. It was felt that some areas of the country will never have groups so individual membership of any national group would also be required. This needs to be discussed. Professionals, who work more than an acre and a half are concerned about standards and may be more interested in joining a group with this as an aim and there are many who don't want to join any groups. Concern was expressed about speed of delivery – it was felt that it would be at least a couple of years of process before action. It was suggested that organisations, such as the RSPB, have no one to talk to about coppicing and this would be a role for a national group. The discussion ended with the suggestion that we could draw up a resolution from this conference.

Those who had spoken during the discussion were asked to put up their hands revealing that well over half had not said anything. Debbie Bartlett explained that this was the reason the flipcharts were used to capture the issues for the industry in a way that could be quantified and used as a robust evidence base to move forwards. All delegates were asked to take the opportunity to write down their views anonymously before the end of the conference.

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We re-grouped for dinner – pate followed by venison casserole and fruit crumble. After which – despite the bar having opened – we regrouped for feedback on the issues that had been identified on the flip charts

Unfortunately Dr Bannister was unable to give the scheduled after dinner talk as she was unwell. However those who had attended the Earthburn during Coppice Week, held in the Ashdown Forest in August, filled in by telling us all about what went on, with John Sinclair as MC



Many thanks are due to Stuart Meier who allowed use of his photos

Friday 8th October

The Chestnut Industry

Steve Homewood is continuing his father's fencing business in Haslemere and remembers when chestnut was cut with an axe. Chestnut was planted in the area from the mid C19th although it is thought most on the Cowdray Estate is 150 years old. The first product was barrel hoops. In the 1950s the firm had about 40 local cutters and also brought material in from 5 or 6 in Kent. 50,000 yards of paling were produced a year or around 1,000 yards a week. In 1963 £8,000 worth – equivalent to the cost of three houses at the time – was sold as snow fencing, still a market in Scotland. The auction price for standing chestnut peaked in the 1980s at £2000 an acre for quality material; now the maximum is around £250. The business still supports 10 part time workers, aged 25 to 75, and sells to Belgium, Scotland and Japan (since the conference Steve has provided chestnut for a Garden Centre in Detroit, USA).

Recently material has been provided for the latest Robin Hood film (although Steve said none is visible in the final film). 6 kilometres of 10" spaced paling has recently been sold to help conserve Capercaillie in Scotland; this rare bird has a tendency to fly directly into deer fencing with fatal results. Paling makes the wire visible. Another new development is close fencing, paling wired with virtually no gap, used as screen fencing in place of panels. Steve ended his presentation with showing chestnut piling in Venice illustrating the durability of this timber and the enormous mature chestnut at the back of Benbow pond, on the Cowdray Estate.



John Drake has been in the chestnut business for 43 years, following his father and uncles. Originally they cut pulp for the Bowaters Mill at Kemsley, near Sittingbourne. When this closed they began cutting 25year + chestnut for post and rail fencing. Material even up to 80 years old can be used and will still re-grow from the stools. There are 10 in his company now but getting new blood is an issue. Newcomers begin by thinking it is exciting but lack the enthusiasm to stay the course.

John said there is a lot of noise made about chip wood but those promoting this seem to think it is a by-product and that promoting this market is doing the industry a favour. But it is not waste, and a fair, better, price is needed to cut it. 40 years ago a living could be made from cutting pulp but the only way to do this now cutting chip wood would require investment of £250,000 + to mechanise, and how many want to do that? By contrast the pale makers, with their shanties in the woods, are low tech but very efficient at production.



Before we set out on the field visits John Sinclair raised the fact that we had done lots of talking but no deciding. He suggested that the conference should consider a resolution, the text of which was as follows:

"This conference proposes that representatives of all coppice groups, and counties/chestnut manufacturers where no formal group exists, be invited to attend the meeting at the Greenwood Centre on 15th November 2010, to discuss which identified issues¹, if any, could be best addressed by the formation of a National Coppice Association."

This was agreed by 47 people (just over half the total delegates), no one disagreed but there were 13 abstentions from the voting. The problem remained of representation and Debbie Bartlett offered to pass names on if those who felt 'out of the loop' emailed her (on the basis that all know her email from making bookings),

After picking up maps and packed lunches we set off again, this time with three visits to fit in and an earlier return to Lodge Hill.

Steve Homewood's yard, Haslemere to see the pale wiring machine. This has advantages over other versions as the spacing can be altered to produce large or small gaps. After wiring alternate pales are stapled to hold the wire firmly in place. Stacks of pales of different sizes, stakes and fencing ready for sale were viewed in the yard.



Vann Common and Marley Heights, chestnut coppice, owned by Robin Barnes (who provides the venue for the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group 'Hands On' days).

As we wandered into the wood we could see a fire in the distance. As we approached we could see Peter and Alex working methodically preparing pales, Peter splitting and Alex peeling using a Petter peeling machine. The machine was turned off and various members of the group tried their hand at cleaving.

We walked higher up the slope with Peter into older chestnut that was being cut for post and rail fencing.



On the way back to the vehicles we passed an area that had been harvested for walking sticks for a number of years, by a local company in Chiddingfold; they send them out to Germany to be bent and processed.

This raises the stools higher than when cut for either pales or post and rail. Peter commented that the poles being exported for re-lining the first World War trenches, in the lead up to the centenary, were cut from the same area.



Lodsworth Community Shop, this was designed by Ben Law as a cheaper alternative to the original brick architect's design. It is timber framed and uses chestnut timber. Will Wallace, one of the delegates, produced the shingles on the roof. Ben's book was on sale and a number of copies were sold – along with many ice creams!



By the time we got back to Lodge Hill for tea, cake and homemade shortbread, numbers were dropping off as those with long distances to travel were keen to get on the road.

Julie Bolton, Woodland Officer for West Sussex County Council stressed the importance of a robust evidence base to her; it is vital if she is to influence the elected members in the council and get them to add their support to the industry – they need to know just how important managing the woodlands is and what the issues are. Information about issues and concerns needs to be fed back in a credible way in order to get things done. The coppice industry is extremely diverse and Julie harked back to her long experience as a county woodland officer (now the only one left in the south east) and remarked on the number of coppice initiatives that have come and gone. She emphasised that although national partners may be needed to address concerns it is absolutely vital to get things right the first time and that the industry should be fully represented in any national initiative. Failure would be catastrophic. She advised that the industry should not be responding to others agendas and said “*don’t let the idea of a coppice association drive you – it’s been done before!*” However national policies can help with local issues such as deer, although the quality issues that have been mentioned throughout the conference are the responsibility of individuals, as is using every last piece of wood, although the best way to do this is by talking to each other. This event has gone some way to achieving this - perhaps another event can be held in another area to continue this.

Julie closed the conference thanking all the delegates for coming, acknowledging that the majority had given up three days earnings in order to attend to share their experiences, as well as travelling a considerable distance in many cases. Julie also thanked Debbie Bartlett, Dave Rossney and Michelle Holland for organising the conference. She thanked Lodge Hill staff for the excellent service and food and expressed particular gratitude to Shelly Newton, from Lantra, for the funding that had made it possible for so many to attend and also for the funding received from Forestry Commission.

Dave Rossney responded by thanking Julie for her role in securing the venue and West Sussex County Council for paying the deposit so that we could give advance warning of the conference dates and venue before the end of 2009.

ISSUES RAISED

An initial analysis of the issues put up on the flip charts was completed so that they could be feedback to the delegates after dinner on the Thursday. This enabled suggestions to be made for solutions and these are given below.

The flip charts were left open for the entire conference so that more comments could be added, particularly by those who only attended for the chestnut day on Friday.

This altered the ‘top 10’ and a complete list of all the issues raised is included below.

<u>The ‘top ten’ issues</u>	Thursday	Friday
Neglected woods - poor produce	12	13
Accessibility/availability of £s (owners not cutters)	10	10
support for new starters 3-5 years	9	9
internal standards	9	10
Deer numbers	8	10
landowner cooperation	7	8
need for restoration	6	6
affordable housing/yards/workshops	6	7
biodiversity/conservation cycles not viable	5	5
Insurance, VAT, tax, complex contracts	5	5
Increase public understanding	5	5
Use groups to share workload and machinery,		
cut delivery miles	4	5

The original – Thursday night – ‘top 10’ issues were listed out on individual flipcharts and delegates were invited to write their solutions under each heading. The results, to the close of the conference, are given below.

SOLUTIONS

1 NEGLECTED WOOD – POOR RESOURCE
Getting owners to let cutters/contractors in
Lovely firewood
Let the new entrants into neglected wood to learn
Get a kiln make charcoal and then carry on to maintain the newly rescued coppice
A good start into the industry – 1 st year work not pay, 2 nd year sell charcoal, 3 rd year move inot next neglected area. Funding needed
You look hard to find things
A market for produce
Woods fragmented or access blocked/degraded/poor + seasonal lack of flat stacking areas and vehicle turning bays an issue
Better grants for restoration
Encourage/educate rich landowners to <u>pay</u> for coppice restoration work – move away from subsidies
Need comprehensive restoration with adequate thinning of standards and understorey restocking
Best practice guides needed for both restoration of derelict and management of good coppice
Too many people don't know what good coppice is
Funding to bring in new talent into industry from all sources
Raising awareness of the benefits
Use volunteers to clear quickly then pay to manage re-growth

2 ACCESS/AVAILABILITY OF GRANTS FOR CUTTERS NOT OWNERS
Funds for ride improvement for access not wildlife
Funds for drainage improvement/repair
Relying on grants is a bit weird
Its an industry not a charity ('agreed' added)
Work for it first

3 SUPPORT FOR NEW STARTERS
Mentoring schemes – site visits, supervisors, feedback (comment added 'ask')
Pay them for laboring ('I agree' added)
Training opportunities made easier ie accessibility of venues, assessors always v busy
More info for school/college leavers
Apprenticeships - some hope for long term careers – with reasonable income – ie value of product
All my training was subsidized – thank you
Subsidized chainsaw tickets?
Pay people for working and train on job ('why?' added)
Pre-apprenticeship engagement for active young people failed by school system
Sow seeds in very young minds

4 FALLING INTERNAL STANDARDS

Complacency sets in easy!!
Euro standard obsessives
Your customers + conscience + ambition guide you
Poor quality work affects us all
Standards need to be raised
Best practice guidelines rather than set rules and regulations?
Customers may think they know what they want but they rarely know what they need. You can't be guided by them
Publicise what is a 'quality' product as decided by the 'right' people
Who are these people?
We cannot control the whole market – how about we be good friends and support each other's efforts
Have a look at Forestry Commission booklet 'making the grade' a visual grading guide for sawn UK timbers – perhaps a small flip chart of images relating to coppice and roundwood

5 DEER NUMBERS

National cull
Cheaper fencing
Cultural change – consuming the problem!
Need grants to encourage deer management and more understanding of guns/culling
Need to be aware that culling is different from 'managing' in deer herds – why do we need to improve carcass weight and trophy quality?
Legislation – deer should be considered similar to rabbit pests and oblige landowners to deal with the problem
Create a 'hazel friendly' venison standard
Harvest this crop
Kill the lot
Inform
National eat more venison initiative
Educate and inform public
Possible regulation to exclude 'armed trespass' charges if finishing a kill on adjoining land

6 LANDOWNER COOPERATION

They do
Make sure they understand the issues – why the land needs to be managed in a certain way and what's in it for them
Education!
Publish prices for in rotation quality coppice
Persuade cooperative owners to allow site visits/get together for those not convinced
Guidance form FC or local authorities regarding felling standards aimed at calming landowners worries

7 AFFORDABLE HOUSING, YARDS AND WORKSHOPS

Less bigotry towards traveler lifestyle x 3
Tied housing x 2
Legislation: planning policies need adapting to allow as 'permitted development'
More enlightened planning officers and flying pigs!
Make it easier for woodland workers to live in the woodland (a 'NO' was added by another)
Or near to it
Realistic sized properties with useful sized yards attached
A more relaxed planning attitude to light weight dwelling structures (yurts/cabins) as opposed to current relaxed attitude to caravans and tin boxes
More appreciation of quality of storage and more buildings. Planners seem suspicious of sturdy, dry, insulated buildings – it is unlikely that local authority employees would put up with drafty, leaky, <u>insecure</u> work premises
Security from theft and security of tenure

8 BIODIVERSITY/CONSERVATION CUTTING CYCLES ARE NOT COMMERCIALY VIABLE

Publish 'case studies' from Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and others that allow local firewood users/coppice workers to cut in SSSI woodlands on a commercial basis and target Wildlife Trusts, the Woodland Trust and councils
Forest Research should recognize publicity
More statistics need to be provided in favour of coppicing
Forestry Commission need to prioritise timber and woodland products (on every site not just their own) we still need a strategic timber reserve and work towards lessening imports, public access/amenity and exercise as priorities seem to take precedence in PR campaigns and funding

9 INSURANCE/VAT/TAX/COMPLEX CONTRACTS

Do you know what you really need?
Are you really covered?
Business Link for possible advice on insurance VAT etc
Offer decent money to landowners/agents for coppice
Recommend 'beech tree' insurance. Cheap. Nice
Share experience
Share knowledge/contacts – networking
Speakers/workshops?

10 LACK OF PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING
More signs
Be friendly
Stop being stroppy
Some people want woodland on their terms and won't be happy with any management, other are lovely
Liaise with local communities to spend a day in the woods - collect /cut bean sticks/firewood (allotment holders added)
Start at the beginning – school kids, teach them in schools and in the woods about what you do (grants can be available for those projects)
I agree, very important for next generation
People like signs Most <u>want</u> to know and understand
Take guidance from Europe and Scandinavia were local authorities own woodland and encourage local residents to cut and collect their own fuel, saving the authorities the costs of thinning and managing young woodland - the woodland and community both benefit.

ALL ISSUES RAISED BY DELEGATES
Fuel price
Change in ownership = coppice overstood
Forestry Commission focus on biodiversity
Deer numbers
Lack of quality hazel
Bad cutting practice
Deer effect on hazel coppice
Lack of funding for restoration
Lack of training opportunities for new entrants
Coppice for grants/conservation rather than products
Lack support from estate owners/FC
Want too much money for peasant work
Some not willing to work hard enough
Too much funding for owners – not cutters
Fuel costs
Insurance costs
Forestry consultants not understanding about coppice – expecting too much cut yr -1; contracts hard to nail
Lack of in rotation hazel
Conservation cycles not commercially viable
Moody softwood contractors
Grumpy greenwood workers
Not enough women
Too many enthusiastic newbies not enough skilled professionals
Getting landowners to share grant money
Can't afford to take on paid staff
Jump from small to large scale large investments small return
Creation of craft guild to set standards
Setting minimum price for products stopping undercutting
Apprenticeship need to be affordable, not academic and not

just 16-19 year olds
Extraction of material
Finding contractors
Finding markets
Lack of in rotation coppice
Cost of deer protection
Competition form imports
Consumer awareness of local sustainable woodland management
grants for improved security
Prevent equipment
Accessible national dosh
Distribution of grants regional local individual-
Finance to support small players and new started
Hazel Material quality – v little grade 1
Chestnut material quality
Support for new starters 3-5 years
Deer
Lack of investment in machinery
Training
Hard to get grant aid
Neglected woods poor produce
Few woodland managers commercially minded
Woodland brought for amenity increasing cost
Deer
European charcoal
Viability of industry for realistic living wage
Product/skills value
Yard costs and overheads
Phytophthora
Large estates not interested in coppicing/woodland management
Small woodland compartmentalization
Hobby coppice workers taking work and not working to wider management plan
Pool resources to reduce delivery miles
Add value to 'worthless' wood and try and sell everything
Promote higher quality within industry for products and services
Use groups to share workload and help others
Awareness of contractors re H&S requirements of land owners and general industry standards
Problem of maintaining rotation on annual basis once 'good' product has been cut
Price of fuel
Bio CHP – machinery chipping high quality timber
More universal spread of coppice sites
More local access to coppice products
More support for products to compete with imports
Attracting young blood
Apprenticeship funding and college time
Conservation and funding opportunities

General communication/advertising
Marketing/networking north of midlands
Income vs current housing costs
Quantity – quality of material
Landowner expectation of returns vs value to cutter
Demand for value added products
Marketing value added products
Is coppice where we need it?
Planting new coppice support
Obtaining raw materials – chestnut
Making use of hazel as a product (currently waste)
Landowners e.g. landmark dragging feet
Lack of in rotation hazel
Lack of focused effort in restoring neglected coppice
Need more grants for coppice restoration
Lack of payment for restoration
General trend of under pricing
Lack of local in rotation coppice
Lack of knowledge among coppice, value and products
Getting established
Lack of in rotation coppice
Deer
Deer
Low value processed wood
VAT and tax
Break up of woods into small plots
Lack of historic interest in coppice from FC/government
Lack of interest in public in handmade crafts
Lack of affordable housing
Lack of affordable yard/workshops
Groups share machinery
Cuts in FC grants
Educating the public that cutting trees is ok
Setting up proper training/apprenticeship
Increased value of timber
Incentives to keep commercial coppice in rotation – not just for conservation
Grants for grants sake
More financial support for works not landowners
Not enough women in industry
Concern over REACH legislation
Public access to worked woodlands – effect on insurance
REACH regulations
Public lack of understanding of coppice
Deer
Support for landowners needed
Charities BTCV make it difficult for professionals
Need subsidies for coppice work
Contracts complex
Insurance
Lack of understanding of what cutters do

ISSUES – added after Thursday
Quality – but what does it mean?
Public awareness and education
Developing new products and skills – difficult when having to earn income all the time
Web based forum for representation – share ideas/resources so do not loose out because of lack of communication/resources
Representation at national level
Industry led training
BHMAT
Deer fencing grants
Phytophthera
More pale makers needed to meet the demand
Coppice week should be in cutting season
? for long term spile use
Deer control/exclusion
Access to woodland – owners restrictions, changes in ownership & small owners
Expectations of value for overstood coppice
Ability to return for re-cut
Training in craft products
Subsidy – prefer for fencing not cutting
Rural housing – temporary on site living policy
Skilled mechanized contractors to cut
Decent price to encourage new entrants
Economic return to owners
learn more from other users
Make contacts with cutters to use in future
Get together to share experience and worries
‘coppice’ used too widely – hazel very different issues to chestnut. Any national group should represent hazel or chestnut
There are 100s of chestnut workers in the SE who aren’t represented here – this conference is a tiny minority we can’t start making rules or standards
Other students have to pay for training – why not apprentices?